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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 PORT AU PRINCE 001704

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DEPARTMENT PASS NSC FOR FISK  
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TAGS: [HA](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#)

SUBJECT: PREVAL PLAYS COY ON ELECTIONS: EVERYONE PLAYS THE  
INTERNATIONAL CARD

REF: PORT AU PRINCE 1649

Classified By: Ambassador Janet A. Saderson, reason 1.5(b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Summary. In a series of encounters with President Preval over the past week, he has continued to insist that he will go forward with senatorial elections. He has not offered any specifics or date. At the same time, he said, he will press ahead on constitutional reform. The President was surprised that the majority of the international community did not back his original proposal to delay elections to allow for constitutional reform. He has apparently backed away from an election freeze. Preval continues to look to the international community for support, while other Haitians are now seeking to use international support to shape the debate.  
End Summary.

¶2. (C) In a series of encounters with President Preval over the past week, he has continued to insist to me that he will go forward with senatorial elections. He has not offered me any specifics or date. At the same time, he said, he will press ahead on constitutional reform. In our most recent discussion of the issue, during a October 19 meeting with visiting USAID Assistant Administrator Paul Bonicelli, Preval noted that the arrangements were "almost in place" for a new CEP to be named. Then the tools would be in place for the senatorial elections, he stated. He contends that his consultations on his constitutional reform proposal were going well, although he acknowledged that there is still work to be done. When I pressed him most recently on the timing of the senatorials, noting the constitutional clock is ticking, he assured me that he is committed to elections taking place "as soon as possible in the best conditions possible," a formula which leaves much unsaid.

¶3. (C) Preval has alternatively been blunt and coy with me on the election issue, perhaps reflecting how far he feels he can deflect an issue about which he clearly has little enthusiasm at this time. Ten days ago, he assured me that the "electoral schedule" would be maintained and senatorial elections would take place shortly. In three subsequent conversations on the issue, however, he has been more vague while continuing to stress his commitment to the process. However, he has refused thus far to set a date and continues to downplay the importance of the indirect elections, arguing that a new CEP offsets the immediate need for the indirect polls. (NOTE. The indirect elections are supposed to produce nominees for the permanent CEP among other local government bodies. END NOTE)

¶4. (C) Preval intimates tell me that he was disagreeably surprised by the pushback, both here and in New York, from the Elections Core Four countries (US, Brazil, Canada, and France) on his original proposal to delay all polls until ¶2012. Regrouping quickly, he now touts a plan which focuses on constitutional reform and a restructured CEP, with senatorial elections at some (unspecified) time in the near future. However, the pushback has not been universal: both the Argentinean and Chilean Ambassadors here believe that Preval and the Haitians, not the international community, should set the country's electoral schedule. There is also some indication that working-level MINUSTAH officials have tacitly supported the Preval proposals, both with regard to elections and constitutional reform.

¶5. (C) Conflicting signals from the international community notwithstanding, Preval is - in time honored Haitian tradition - attempting to pull Haiti's friends into the debate. He clearly intended to use the international community's support for his plan as a rationale for delaying elections. Forced to jettison that idea, he left many Haitians with the impression that the U.S. and others had signed off on his constitutional reform during the UN meetings last month. Most recently, he has been quoted as saying that "foreign experts" would be involved in examining possible changes to the constitution. Most observers here believe that to be a reference to Americans or Canadians. (Note. Either would, I believe, be problematic in this fiercely nationalistic nation. End note.) Preval is not alone in playing the international card: Sen. Rudy Boulos and his colleagues who recently returned from Washington, are telling Haitians here that they "got the USG to pressure

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Preval" to commit to senatorial elections; Boulos now wants to go to Ottawa to persuade Canada to push Preval to back away from his constitutional reform plan, much to the dismay of my Canadian colleague. Senate President Lambert has now said that he is planning a journey north to "tell everyone what we (Haitians) really think."

¶6. (C) Comment. The debate on Preval's proposal now preoccupies Haiti's political leadership, leaving it precious little time for the real business of governing. Preval is now spending most of his days lobbying for his proposals, most recently with the mayors. Some of our interlocutors assume that Preval, with his eye firmly fixed on constitutional revision, will soon fold on the issue of senatorial elections and set a date. The more cynical among them believe that rewriting the constitution was Preval's plan all along. Whatever the rationale, the president's actions thus far have engendered a certain degree of political tension and uncertainty here, commodities not necessarily conducive to positive discussion -- or fostering political stability.  
SANDERSON